



American Heart Association® | American Stroke Association®

Learn and Live®

**Written Testimony of
Corinne Orlando
Director of Government Relations
American Heart Association/American Stroke Association**

**Before the
New Jersey Senate Health, Human Services and Senior
Citizens Committee
November 8, 2010**

Committee Chair Weinberg, Vice Chair Vitale and members of the committee:

Good Afternoon. My name is Corinne Orlando and I am the New Jersey Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Committee Chair Weinberg for inviting me to testify this afternoon about the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association's efforts to reduce obesity and improve the cardiovascular health of all New Jerseyans.

Obesity itself is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease and stroke. The sharp increase in obesity since 1980 is alarming. The Framingham Heart Study indicates that obese individuals are 104% more likely to develop heart failure as non-obese individuals. Overall, obesity can shorten life expectancy by up to 10 years.

At the most basic level, the rise in obesity can be attributed to an increase in the amount of calories Americans consume, and a decrease in the amount of calories expended through physical activity. USDA data indicates that by 2003, the amount of calories that an average American consumes in a day jumped to 2,757. In addition, Americans are increasingly sedentary. In fact, 23% of deaths from major chronic diseases are linked to sedentary lifestyles.

The American Heart Association/American Stroke Association is dedicated to promoting prevention of heart disease through a healthy lifestyle. Prevention is a major theme in all of our initiatives.

One of our most successful initiatives in New Jersey has been the Go Red for Women movement. Our three Go Red luncheons and other events throughout the year are designed to educate women about the warning signs and risk factors of heart disease and raise awareness that cardiovascular disease is the number 1 disease killer of

women in New Jersey and the nation. In 2009, a new online feature, Better U, was launched. This 12 week program guides participants in making small, incremental changes to improve heart health, including better nutrition and increasing physical activity to control weight.

Start! is the American Heart Association's movement to get American workers to start exercising by walking. This workplace-based initiative provides companies that participate with resources to implement a walking program and allows employees to track their progress online. National Start! Walking Day and National Start! Eating Healthy Day are two events that companies and other employers in New Jersey participate in to educate their employees and encourage them to make healthier choices. In July 2010, the American Heart Association recognized 30 New Jersey companies as "Start! Fit-Friendly Companies." This designation is awarded to employers that go above and beyond in promoting employee health.

Although our programs encourage individuals to make healthier choices for themselves and their families, system changes that will have a positive impact on entire communities are needed. Access to affordable healthy food and the availability of safe places for physical activity are two essential factors in the fight against obesity that require policy and environmental change on a large scale, and there are many others. These changes must be made at the community level to empower individuals to take charge of their health. The American Heart Association/American Stroke Association in New Jersey is an active partner in the Shaping NJ coalition and we are committed to collaborating with other organizations in the partnership, as well as elected officials and others in the community to bring about positive changes that will make it easier to adopt a heart healthy lifestyle.

On behalf the American Heart Association, I respectfully request your consideration of creating a bi-partisan Health and Wellness task force, comprised of legislators of both parties with an interest in improving the health and wellness of New Jerseyans by decreasing obesity and increasing physical activity.

Again, I would like to thank Committee Chair Weinberg for inviting me to address you today as well as the entire committee for taking the time to listen to my testimony on behalf of the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.